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# Medical Missionary Work in the Delta

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# A Day's Experience With a Doctor in Egypt

Miss E. Dorcas Teas

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# MEDICAL MISSIONARY WORK IN THE DELTA

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## Beginning of the Work in Tanta

When one thinks what "The Delta" means in size and population, and how few of its six millions of inhabitants have yet been reached, a fitter title would be "The Possibilities," or more enthusiastically, "The Future of Medical Work in the Delta." Some years ago a beginning was made in Tanta. This city is the geographical center—the hub of the Delta. Religiously it is the mecca of Egypt, and to its famous shrine come the faithful when en route for their Arabian pilgrimage. It's a great mosque which has risen over the bones of the canonized Ahmed. Said El Bedani is one of the emissaries of Islam. So as a multiplier of opportunities and a removal of prejudices the medical work was undertaken—an adjunct to the formal evangelizing agencies.

## Clinics in Tanta

The practice here is many-sided—among all classes and many nationalities. Indeed, Egypt is so cosmopolitan that one longs to be a polyglot. There are daily clinics, to which come the poor of the city and the peasants from the near villages. In the gathering time an earnest, tactful Bible woman reads and explains the Scriptures. The patients are largely Moslem, and here, for the first time, they learn of our Saviour and His salvation.

## Home Visiting

There is also home visiting among the poor. Often the native mid-wives send for help in a difficult case, and many an anxious hour has been spent in some little, dark, dirty room fighting for a life. There are calls, too, in the homes of the better class, and an increasing number to the harems of the rich. We have also what might be called a private practice among the resident English and European. Despite the oriental setting it is much what such a practice would be at home. Financially the work is a great help, and haply it is not without its missionary and philanthropic value. Often calls come from neighboring towns and villages to foreign and native patients. These are readily accessible because of Tanta's numerous radiating railways.

## The Egyptian Peasants

The most ideally missionary work is this among the peasants in the daily clinics. These are the men, and women, too, "with the hoe"—the sun-browned children of Father Nile, who live on his bounty, and, in turn, by their labor make his country the marvel of the nations. They have as yet been little influenced by the Westernism which is making the new Egypt of the cities and towns. The church reaches them in part by the colporteurs, but largely through the medical work. With simple habits and food, an out-of-door life, and a purifying all-flooding sunshine from year's end to year's end, it would seem that the Egyptian peasant had little need of medical attention. But a race-long instinct gath-

ers them into villages of dark, closely-huddled mud houses and stagnant, green bordering pools. Parents, children, camels, donkeys, buffalos, sheep and poultry make a "happy" family under one low roof. Germs, especially of eye diseases, luxuriate. Long hours of work in summer heat and in the dampness of the irrigated fields causes illness and disease.

### Description of a Typical Clinic

So it is that, of a forenoon, there will be gathered into a typical clinic a goodly number of men, women and children. As we approach the building a group will be seen in a shady spot socially eating, while a solemn donkey or two browse on stray bits of provender. Would that I could give you a pen picture of types and individuals. The men in their brown cloaks of homespun goats' wool, the women in ragged print gowns or coarse indigo-dyed slips and head coverings, the children in abbreviated models of their elders' costumes, the babies in odds and ends. As the doctor enters the waiting-room there is a scrambling to their feet of the groups of women sitting on the floor and of their lords of creation occupying the benches; and a chorus of greetings in rich colloquial Arabic: "May your day be happy!" "May your morning be like cream!" or—the equivalent of what's "The top of the morning to yez!" Stepping over crawling babies and avoiding dirty toddlers, who are yet in the wobbly stage, the doctor opens the office door. There is a rush to be first inside and eloquent appeals for immediate attention: "My home is far away," "I have been here since dawn," etc.

But a deaf ear is turned, and they are told that no one will be treated until after the Bible lesson and prayer. So they good-naturedly settle down again and gossip together until the evangelist appears. Gathering the people about him he reads the Bible stories and parables, and transposes them into homely, every-day Arabic. One day a graphic description is given of the wonderful clinics held by the Great Physician with a leading up to the need of healing sin-sick souls. Again it is the parables. Thus patiently the story which we have to tell them is unfolded. The audience shows its appreciation by responses of approval and surprise. Indeed it has the sound of a good old Methodist meeting. With the audience there is no question of creed or interpretation. It is the painstaking, oft-repeated instillation of the essential doctrines—the reality of sinfulness, the need of repentance, salvation through Christ, etc. Maybe an old, half-blind Sheik, who sits nodding over his staff, on hearing the name of Christ, will wake up and challenge the statement of his being the Son of God. This is the orthodox Moslem's objection. The Koran is appealed to, and the noisy arguer made to acknowledge that the Koran says that Christ is from the Spirit of God. He is silenced, but, alas, not convinced. But no amount of arguing or polemic encounter will suffice to bring one of their needy souls to a saving knowledge of the Saviour. It comes only through the quiet working of the Spirit and the secret germinating of seed dropped into hearts prepared by such humble meetings, or by the colporteur, as, traveling

from village to village, he has wayside and home talks, or by those silent missionaries, the Bible and religious books.

### Peasant Children

The patients are admitted to the treatment room by fours and fives. Often it is a child which is brought. These little folks, when one is able to overlook the dirt and flies and other evidences of a neglected toilet, are interesting specimens. They learn the world from a perch on their mother's shoulder. Here they sit, their eyes and head unprotected from the sun, while the mother goes about her work selling in the market, driving a donkey, picking cotton, etc. The little one naps and wakes regardless of the jolting, the heat and the flies. They are given the choice of the family menu. Babies cut their teeth on green cucumbers, so it is logical that they should have a double portion of the ills of childhood. Thousands of them never live out their first year.

The doctor and the Bible woman have little personal talks in the intervals of treatment. Through patient listening to the tale of physical ills the life stories are drawn out—the comedy and the tragedy. With the medicine is given advice, sympathy, a word of interest in their little world, or timely appeal for a thought of the Christian's Saviour. The men are generally able to repeat the substance of the evangelist's talk with such embellishments as their knowledge of the Koran may afford. The women at first, when asked what they have heard, will say: "Do I know, O Sitt? I am but a donkey. I have no

mind.'' But in time the mind is rediscovered. The evidence of a bettering influence is seen. The children are brought with washed faces and clean dresses; they are more gentle to each other; less eager to be served first; more affectionate and grateful to the doctor. One forlorn body, who, with her brown, bright-eyed baby eagerly greeted us each morning, calling down all the blessings of the prophet on our heads, impulsively exclaimed, ''I am happier since coming to you and do not cry so much.'' ''Do you pray?'' I asked. ''No; I can't.'' ''Why?'' ''My husband was angry and pushed me from the roof. My knee was hurt and I cannot bend it.'' This but illustrates the difficulty and the primary character of our teaching among these daughters who ''sit in the darkness'' of Islam. After the patients have gotten their treatment they go away home—passing along the dykes, through the far stretching green fields in the setting sunlight to their villages. What do they carry with them? This land with its marvelously fertile fields and its millions of lowly tillers must some day be Immanuel's land. God grant that medical missions may at least have an humble part in this glorious transformation.

Perhaps in medicine more than in any other form of mission work, is the opportunity richer in which to show Christ to those who know Him not. Medicine should be a most gracious, winning and valuable hand-maiden in missionary work. It wants but the inspiration of the great Master Physician who by His example has for all time glorified and made divine the healing art.

## A DAY'S EXPERIENCE WITH A DOCTOR IN EGYPT

**Miss E. Dorcas Teas**

One evening Dr. Henry received a telegram from a village not far from Assiut to visit a man who for weeks had been suffering with an abcess of the liver. He had previously been advised to have an operation performed, but had refused it. However, when his friends despaired of his recovery, and he himself was alarmed over his condition, the call came to the doctor: "Come at once and operate."

Early the next morning, after the important cases in the hospital were cared for, instruments, basins, towels, dressings, chloroform, etc., were carefully packed and the two doctors and myself, as nurse, started off on our errand of mercy.

An hour's ride by rail brought us to the station, where we had to look around for some kind of beasts to carry us and our precious baggage to the sick man's home. Presently two donkeys came in sight, neither having saddle or bridle. Having been advised before leaving Assiut to prepare for such an emergency, I had taken my side saddle with me, and the donkey boy, after much persuasion, provided me with a bridle.

Dr. Henry mounted the second donkey, which had only a cloth thrown over it for a saddle, with a stick in his hand to guide the little animal as he traveled along. The horse brought for Dr. McLaughlin had on it a grotesque-like saddle, with stirrups to it like tin shoes. Considering the times and circumstances, we rode off in real

Egyptian style, with a native in charge of our baggage, who "vowed" he would take special care of it. It was not long, however, until hearing a "thud" back of us we looked around and saw the man, baggage, donkey and all rolling down the slope from the railroad track. We had a feeling of uneasiness lest bottles were broken and instruments injured, but after helping the man once more to mount his donkey, with the assurance that all our things were safe, we resumed our journey in a manner much like Abraham must have done in his day; although boys running alongside of travelers to urge the donkeys along may be of a more recent usage. An hour and a quarter's ride brought us to the so-called home of the patient. To describe the poor emaciated man we need only to say that he looked like a mummy, thousands of years old. Now and then he breathed and would whisper a word or two, beseeching the doctors to help him. With his thin face covered with dirt, he put on such a look of pleading that one could not resist trying to help relieve his suffering. However, he was too weak to endure an operation.

The surroundings of this home were all in keeping with the appearance of the man. It was large, with numerous courts, or enclosures of brick walls, some being roofed over and others open to the clear blue sky, which, in its purity, was striking in its contrast to the place and people who occupied the same apartments with the cattle, sheep, goats and donkeys.

All occupants seemed alike indifferent to the luxury of the bath, which cannot be said of all

Egyptians. While there are those who give great attention to cleanliness, many fear water where there is sickness, and the poor patient is left day after day, until as in the case mentioned, layer after layer of dirt had accumulated, making him appear as if wrapped in mummy cloth many years old. As it was found to be too late to give relief through an operation for which we had come prepared, we were invited cordially to sit down on the pretty rugs that were spread for us on the ground. There being no drug store nearer than three hours ride from the house, Dr. Heury took from his ever-ready saddle-bag of medicine some powders, and while preparing them he talked with the patient about the condition of his soul. It was said that he was rich in this world's goods, but, oh, how poor he was in the "treasures laid up above!"

He was afraid to appear before his God, although he called himself a Christian. But this name means very little to many thousands in the Coptic church of Egypt. They are quite as ignorant as the Mohammedans who are sitting in gross darkness and know not the true Light. The sick man asked to be prayed for, and it was pitiful to see his long, thin, grimy fingers clutching at the hands of those near him as he eagerly asked if there was not some chance yet to have the operation.

In the meantime a number of blind, half-blind, lame and sick persous, who had learned of the doctor's presence, crowded in to claim his attention, uutil it was difficult for him to administer to auyone.

True hospitality is a characteristic of the Egyptians, and it was not lacking on this occasion. A bountiful repast was spread in the best manner, and we were cordially invited to sit down and partake. Even while eating the sick ones gathered around the doctor, notwithstanding the family tried to keep them away, and prescriptions were written and given out as rapidly as possible. Some were able to pay for these, but to the poor they were given free of charge. During the time the doctor lost no opportunity to present the need of the sin-sick souls.

At last the hour approached for our return to the station to take the train for Assiut. There was great difficulty in extricating ourselves from the crowd, and as we mounted our animals we were obliged to be almost rude in order to get started. Many, however, followed us out of the little town and through the fields, making us anxious lest the train would leave us. As "all things come to an end," so did our journey, and we found ourselves back home, hot and weary. Yet we rejoiced that we had been able during the long day to speak to many about their soul's salvation. After a hurried visit to the hospital, as the evening shades gathered around us, we thought of the Master who walked through Galilee and Samaria teaching and preaching and healing the people, with the prayer in our hearts that He would teach those with whom we had met—who were like "sheep without a shepherd."

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